

Correspondence

To the Editor of the Journal of British Studies:

Dr. Pargellis' warnings to critics of the new *Guide to Historical Literature*, quoted by Professor Burrell, are deserving of respectful attention, but they scarcely constitute an adequate reply to Professor Charles Mullett's letter. To be reminded that the British section of the *Guide* cannot be a full Bibliography of British History does nothing to explain why there are nearly twice as many entries for modern France as for Britain. Was it for the sake of including critical elucidation such as the following (the entry is quoted in its entirety): "Carswell, John. *The Old Cause: Three Biographical Studies in Whiggism*. London, 1954. Biographical study of the development of English Whiggism." Or this: "Brown, Philip A. *The French Revolution in English History*. London, 1918. Impact of the French Revolution on English life."

There will always be disagreements among men of good will – and good scholarship – concerning the selection of entries in a bibliography, especially one in which space is understandably at a premium. But it is difficult to believe that any judicious observer could applaud the inclusion of Ernest Watkins' ephemeral study of the 1945 Labour Government, *The Cautious Revolution*, while Arnold Rogow's documented and serious study, *The Labour Government and British Industry*, is omitted. Why include John Gore's *King George V, A Personal Memoir*, while failing to mention its companion, Sir Harold Nicolson's magistral study of the King's public career, a work of far greater usefulness to students of history? Why give us Arthur Grubb's *From Candle Factory to British Cabinet: the Life Story of the Right Honourable John Burns* (London, 1908), and not Lord Elton's *Life of James Ramsay MacDonald* or M. A. Hamilton's imperfect but important biography of Arthur Henderson? Why Lord Attlee's *As It Happened*, which is so monumentally uncommunicative a work that *Punch* tried almost in vain to parody it, and yet withhold from the student's ken all four of Beatrice Webb's autobiographical volumes, *My Apprenticeship*, *Our Partnership*, and the *Diaries* down to 1932? Why Sir Arthur Bryant on Pepys, but no word of Pepys on Pepys? And before the shortage of space is accepted as the answer for any and all queries, why do the 715 British entries include at least three

cases of apparently unconscious duplication (i.e., there are no cross-references),* and several more conscious ones?

None of the above works was published after 1956; the omission from the *Guide* of the most recent publications is understandable, although a cut-off date of 1956 for a volume published in 1961 does make one wonder whether the project might not have been carried out with greater efficiency had the energies going into it been more concentrated and the diffusion of responsibility less extreme.

Finally, Dr. Pargellis' comments were surely not intended to excuse plain errors and misleading statements, such as the description of G. D. H. Cole's 517-page *History of the Labour Party from 1914* as a "Useful brief survey," or the statement that Keith Hutchison's *Decline and Fall of British Capitalism* is a book about "the various economic and social changes that have occurred in Britain since the end of World War II," when eighteen of its nineteen chapters concern the period 1880-1945. Who would guess, from the listing of James Joll (ed.), *Britain and Europe: Pitt to Churchill* among "more recent surveys" of foreign policy that it is in fact a collection of excerpts from sources — speeches and the like? Or that it is one of the "British Political Tradition" series, the remaining volumes of which turn up a bit later, properly identified but again with no indication that they are documents collections?

It will no doubt be noted that I have taken my examples from but one part of the new *Guide* (although the same was not entirely true of Professor Mullett). Is this because, despite Dr. Pargellis' warning, I obstinately insist upon examining the book as if it were intended for specialists rather than for beginning historians and the educated general reader? I do not think so, for just as the volume had to be compiled by specialists, so must it inevitably be criticized by specialists — not for its exclusion of esoteric works, but for the ways in which it falls short of achieving its own designated purposes. Critics must not be brushed aside with a plea, in effect, to refrain from shooting the pianist. The *Guide* appears under the auspices of the American Historical Association; the project enjoyed the support of a leading foundation; the end product bears every outward sign of being authoritative to the fullest degree possible. If this appearance is deceptive, at least as regards portions of the work, the profession will not be well served by silence on the subject, nor by bland answers to uncomfortable questions.

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* VA164 and 463, 402 and 425, 171 and 437.

To the Editor of the Journal of British Studies:

Surely the fundamental issue in the Butterfield-Namier controversy is exhibited by a passage on p. 273 of Butterfield's *George III and the Historians*, where he reprobates the Namierians for practising "a form of historiography which lacks the breadth to comprise the higher purposes of the Rockinghamites"; for the Rockinghamites "showed a sense – though perhaps an imperfect sense – of the long-term needs of the country, the needs that the future was going to make plain. It is not clear that our constitution would have developed quite so satisfactorily as it has done if George III had been allowed simply to proceed unopposed."

As some student has scribbled in the margin of the library copy I have just consulted, "How whig can you get?" – "whig" in the particular sense given to it by Butterfield as a term of denigration in historiography. "Higher purpose," "long-term needs," "needs that the future was going to make plain" – these are truly astounding expressions from the historian who a quarter of a century before devoted a classic essay to anathematizing "the tendency in many historians to . . . praise revolutions provided they have been successful. . . to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present" (*The Whig Interpretation of History*, 1931, p. v). And he was right to do so. That the activities of the Rockinghamites contributed to the development of the present British constitution – to the fusion of the legislative and executive branches of government – is undeniable. But that this development was the fulfilment of a "long-term need" of Great Britain is beyond the power of any historian to demonstrate. Other countries have evolved very different types of constitutions, which their inhabitants, so far as the historian can tell, find as "satisfactory" as Butterfield finds the present British one. Nothing is easier than to cite passages from the Butterfield of 1931 in mordant and just condemnation of the "form of historiography" practised here by the Butterfield of 1957: "In the most concrete sense of the words our constitution is not merely the work of men and parties; it is the product of history. . . . There is no logic in being grateful to anybody or anything except to the whole past which produced the whole present"; and much more.

In 1931 Butterfield condemned Acton and others for practising historiography characterized by "breadth" which enabled them to condone or ignore unsavory activity by historical individuals and groups on the grounds of the "higher purposes" that the future

demonstrated that activity to contain. In 1957 he condemns Namier and his successors for lacking such breadth. But it is the earlier book that carries conviction and provides an impregnable defence of the Namierian "form of historiography" against the strictures of the later Butterfield.

Yours faithfully,

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